

Escaping from Evening Television Watching Brings a Businessman Many Rewards

Donald W. Mitchell

What do you do at the end of a long, trying work day? If you are like many people, watching television after dinner will be a way to relax and restore energy before another work day dawns.

Bill Kempen was having just such a peaceful evening of television watching when he suddenly realized that at 58 he was wasting his time with such viewing: He could surely be doing something more productive. What should he do instead?

In making that judgment to turn off his television set in the evenings, please realize that Bill Kempen was far from being a so-called couch potato. He co-headed a successful recruitment and human resources consulting firm. His physical fitness was so good that Bill was selected to represent South Africa in the World Power-Lifting Bench-Press competition at age 56. To help his community, he regularly spent his time helping the underprivileged in a variety of ways.

He wondered if he could use his evening hours in part-time studies for an MBA degree, a potential accomplishment that had long interested him. Attracted by an advertisement in the *Economist* for an online university, Bill joined the millions who are coming home from a full day of work to begin graduate studies.

What motivated him to take on this particularly time- and energy-consuming task? His job involved human resources consulting, a field in which academic credentials are helpful for attracting clients. MBA studies could also assist him to catch up with and make good use of the latest literature in his field.

He also hoped that MBA studies would enable him to be a more effective leader for his company while his firm helped clients to be more successful. Looking toward the near future, he hoped to retire in just a few years and to write a family history. Improving the company's profits from MBA education would make retirement more certain and financially affordable.

In retirement, Bill hoped to spend more time with his family, help financially where necessary, arrange for family get-togethers on holidays, and spend more time with friends he had neglected during his busy consulting years. He hoped that profits would be good enough for him to sell his ownership in the consulting firm gradually and cut back on his

consulting load. He planned to retire totally from consulting after receiving the final payment from selling his business. Perhaps writing a novel might be added to a long list of planned home improvement projects.

There's no doubt that Bill loves education, both learning and teaching. Before becoming a consultant, he worked for many years as a teacher, studied at two training colleges and a university, and lectured at two business schools. During his time teaching working students, he noticed that deadlines were a major problem. When work demands rose, school work quality dropped well below a student's potential.

He decided to avoid that problem in his own studies by finding a university where he would have no deadlines to meet, student-friendly modules of study, and profitable ways to apply the learning to his work.

While studying for his MBA, Bill took a wide range of courses designed to improve his personal effectiveness, knowledge of his field, and the productivity of his company. In each case, he did the work online under the supervision of an individual tutor who was a well-recognized business authority.

Two aspects of his university experiences particularly pleased him: Learning to write better and interaction with his course advisors. Here is what he had to say about writing:

“I must emphasize the role that Laurel Barley played in assisting me to present acceptable academic papers. Her comments on my first assignments made me wonder if she believed that English was possibly my second or third language. With much coaching, and delightful comments from Laurel, I managed to improve on my thirty years of business shorthand and improve my grammatical style. Laurel started complimenting me after a few months, and even I noticed the improvement in the quality of my work which nevertheless still needs attention to keep on improving.”

He shared these observations about his course advisors:

“When a student sits in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the lecturers in America, maintaining contact with the student and personalizing the studies, is not easy. The advice given by the dean and his response to my letters or applications for course advisors left me with the impression that I was not just another number. The delightful sense of humor and the earnestness and professionalism with which the course advisors treated me, were extremely supportive. I sincerely appreciated the personal letters written by the course advisors giving advice on matters which arose within the assignments.”

Was it worth all of the effort? Bill seems to think so:

“To complete an MBA in the month that I turn sixty years old is a personal achievement of which I am quietly proud. The amount of knowledge and skills I have acquired through my studies and tutors has been extensive, exciting, and rewarding, BUT my company has been, and will be, the major benefactor. I have learned how to analyze and correct problems in our business, which I did not know how to do before I commenced these studies. The effect on our business is already visible in terms of improved morale and improved turnover.

“On a more personal basis there has been progress in a number of areas. I know I have sometimes not handled the stress well due to coping with long hours studying at home, a business that was losing turnover, poor cash flow, long hours at work too, and poor staff morale.

“In the end it has been worth it. The business has been turned round, and the habit of focusing on set objectives in business, family, social, intellectual and spiritual life, is paying dividends.

“Thank you, Rushmore University, for your help.”

Since graduating, Bill Kempen has been happy to complete his family’s history, *Leaves of the Kempen Family Tree*. Work is already being planned for a second edition that will feature his various ancestors’ roles in the Anglo-Boer War. Not letting any grass grow under his feet, he has already started researching drug addiction among young people as possible background for a novel.

It seems as though he never did get back to watching television in the evenings. And that’s just the way he likes it.

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Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your effectiveness, visit

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